

Huxlow Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122053
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	359160
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	801
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Kelby
Headteacher	Michael Malton
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2007
School address	Finedon Road Irthlingborough, Wellingborough NN9 5TY
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 40 lessons taught by 39 different teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the college's work and looked at documentation relating to planning, monitoring, safeguarding, communications with parents and carers, and questionnaires from 201 parents and carers and 100 students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness with which the college uses assessment information to tailor work to students' individual needs and promote their ability to work independently.
- Variations in student outcomes and what these indicate about how effectively the college embeds its policies and practices.
- The quality of education provided in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The college is smaller than the average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is higher than the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The college has had specialist status in science since September 2004 and gained a further specialism in applied learning in 2009. The college works in a consortium with three other providers in order to make more extensive provision available to students in the sixth form.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This good college has a well-established track record of ensuring that students of all abilities make good progress. The charismatic senior leadership team have established a 'Huxlow Way' that ensures high levels of consistency in the use of assessment, including a relentless focus on students achieving challenging targets. Staff have strong relationships with students, who are known as individuals. Outstanding care, guidance and support make a substantial contribution to the success students experience at the college. This is a major factor in the particularly impressive outcomes associated with those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students justifiably think their college is a very special place. Students develop a clear set of values that include high expectations about behaviour and a commendable willingness to interact with others from different backgrounds.

Students particularly enjoy their lessons, where the first priority is to make the subject matter interesting. Staff use assessment well to ensure students of all abilities are challenged and gain a sense of achievement, particularly at the end of lessons when they reflect critically on their learning. In the very best lessons students take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning, often because they have a particularly good awareness of the assessment criteria. In a minority of lessons, inconsistent application of college policy means that these aspects of assessment are relative weaknesses.

The college has wisely chosen a second specialism to enhance its academic curriculum by increasing the availability of vocational courses. The first specialism is well established and there has been a particularly strong impact in terms of the high standards in all science subjects. The college is making headway in successfully tackling the weakness in the sixth form that have been responsible for the weaker outcomes here compared to those in the main college. Concerted action leading to the improved use of assessment has overcome barriers to learning, particularly for boys and for students known to be eligible for free school meals.

Good systems for self-review mean that the college knows what it needs to do to become outstanding. For instance, it recognises that although it engages very well with the parents and carers of its potentially more vulnerable students, it is not always successful in actively involving other parents and carers in the children's education. So far improvement has been driven successfully by the senior leadership team with a limited contribution from middle leaders, but all these factors together mean that the college has a good capacity for further sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and learning outstanding by ensuring that:

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- all teachers make consistently good use of the college's agreed approach to lesson planning
- all teachers use their subject knowledge to inspire students in their learning, particularly at the beginning of lessons
- students are provided with consistently good opportunities to work independently, and are always encouraged to take responsibility for assessing their progress and identifying what they need to do to improve their work.
- Make leadership and management outstanding by:
 - increasing middle leaders' effectiveness, particularly in terms of monitoring teaching, implementing improvements and contributing to the college's strategic vision
 - improving the college's engagement with parents and carers so that the vast majority are actively involved in supporting their child's learning.
- Ensure the outcomes in the sixth form match those of the rest of the college by:
 - embedding the more rigorous approach to academic guidance that has recently been established
 - ensuring that high expectations are evident in every aspect of provision.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students start in the college with levels of attainment that are below average, and make good progress to reach average levels overall by the time they leave. In science and physical education, attainment is high and students make outstanding progress because of the particularly effective teaching in these subjects. In all other subjects students make good progress. The college ensures that all groups achieve well, but the students with special educational needs and/or disabilities needs receive additional individually planned support and their progress is outstanding. The college is understandably proud of its 'Every Grade Matters' policy, which reflects that fact that every student who is not making good progress receives appropriate levels of additional support. The college's reliable assessment data indicate that the students are on track to attain at higher levels than in 2010. Inspectors were also reassured by the quality of learning observed in lessons. Almost all students concentrated well, even on the few occasions when teaching was not particularly stimulating. Students are keen to respond to teachers' questioning and they show considerable enthusiasm when they undertake work more independently. Students' behaviour is good in lessons and around the college. Most students' desire to learn means they are justifiably frustrated on the few occasions when they are distracted by other students who undertake some minor off-task behaviour.

When given the opportunity, students work well with each other and show they are capable of working independently. Students have reasonable opportunities to participate in work-related activities, and more are planned through the college's applied learning specialism. Average levels of basic skills and attendance mean they are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their education. The college has adopted some innovative approaches to ensuring students influence learning. For instance, the 'impact' group are actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching. Students' views are regularly surveyed and a college council is active in most year groups. There are major strengths in

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students' social, moral and, increasingly, cultural development. Students' spiritual development is slightly hampered because opportunities are sometimes missed in lessons to encourage deeper reflection on particularly noteworthy experiences.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Lesson plans clearly state the expected learning outcomes at three levels, so as to aid the development of learning activities for the full ability range. Generally this is effective, and this is a major reason why students consistently make good progress. The inclusion of a grade so that students can make the link with their targets is also effective, as seen when teachers intervened part way through a lesson to ensure a student could recognise how their work related to the lesson objectives and grades. As a result of these interventions students' work rate and motivation increased as the required outcome became clear. Questioning is effective because teachers ask follow-up questions to probe learning and increasingly adopt strategies to ensure all students have to think about responses. The very best teaching ensured high levels of enjoyment because teachers inspired and enthused students through the lesson content. Teachers judged precisely the best time to introduce the assessment criteria. Some teaching was less effective because the assessment criteria were not sufficiently challenging, often because they did not promote higher-order thinking. Learning in some lessons was reduced because teachers devoted rather too much time to the assessment criteria at the beginning of lessons and not

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enough attention later to enabling students to critically reflect on their learning. Well-organised teaching assistants were observed to be offering effective support in many lessons.

The college monitors carefully students' participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and is developing these further to involve more students. The curriculum ensures all students gain qualifications in design technology and a modern foreign language. Teaching assistants play an important role in helping to ensure students develop their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects. There are effective adaptations for a small minority of students who need an alternative to traditional lessons. There is a reasonable range of courses available for older students, including some vocational options. The college is sensibly developing further options for students from Year 9 upwards through its partnerships with other providers.

The effective use of assessment information enables the college to precisely target support. The strong relationships between staff and students are a major asset supporting the provision of effective care for students. Recent improvements in attendance, low exclusion rates and the excellent progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are all indicators of the effectiveness of this aspect of provision. The college was able to share with inspectors many examples of the effective support it provides, including for some students who have been excluded from other schools. Students particularly value the role of their heads of year because of their willingness to respond to any concerns.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders provide strong leadership that has ensured high expectations of staff and students, and constantly reinforce these through a high profile presence around the college. The college monitors teaching and learning rigorously and has successfully ensured improvements in response to this. The senior leaders with responsibility for teaching, learning and the use of assessment have sharp insights into this key area of provision. Professional development is effective, particularly at whole-college level. Strategic planning identifies suitable longer-term priorities and is a useful tool for monitoring development. The impact of middle leaders is less evident in most subjects, and the college recognises that if it is to become outstanding, then this group need to be even more effective.

The governing body is ambitious for the college and is influential in determining the strategic direction of the college, for instance in terms of supporting post-16 partnership

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development. The college's record in ensuring all groups achieve well is testament to the commitment to ensuring equal opportunities. The college is beginning to analyse all outcomes in terms of the impact on different groups to further improve this aspect. The college meets all the government requirements relating to safeguarding and ensures that good practice is followed through regular staff training. It is taking effective steps to take greater account of parental and student views when reviewing this provision. The college has taken a thorough approach to promoting community cohesion. It has involved students in this process so there is a strong commitment to plugging the gaps that have been identified, such as further developing links with ethnic groups that are not represented in the immediate area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form outcomes are improving well, following several years in which there has been weakness in students' progress. This is now satisfactory and their attendance is high as a result of a much more rigorous approach to the monitoring of all sixth form outcomes. Retention rates have also improved sharply as a result of better guidance that ensures students are on appropriate courses. Students have reasonable opportunities to contribute positively to the community through supporting younger students in the college and in local primary schools. Students take care to ensure their personal well-being. The majority of students are gaining access to the prestigious Russell Group universities.

Provision is improving, and particularly the use of assessment, which is now more in line with the good practice in the main college. Students have aspirational targets and these are regularly reviewed. Lessons highlight more clearly the outcomes for students of differing ability. The sixth form lessons seen were mainly satisfactory although one was outstanding. Some opportunities were missed to challenge students, for instance by

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requiring them to critically evaluate each other's responses. Students experience an effective programme of personal, social and health education. The consortium arrangements offer students a wide variety of courses, including some vocational options. Students praised the advice and guidance they receive related to university applications.

In recognition that the sixth form was the weak link in college provision, this phase has been a high priority in recent years. A new head of sixth form, improved accountability arrangements and a more regular focus on the sixth form in various link meetings have improved the provision. These changes are yet to be embedded fully, although there are promising signs of improvement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed with all the statements. A very small minority did not feel that the college helps them support their child's learning or helps their child to have a healthy lifestyle, and some commented on behavioural issues. Inspectors looked into these concerns carefully. They judged that the college should do more to enable parents and carers to better support their child's learning. They also judged that the college is effective in managing behaviour and promotes healthy living well through the healthy meals it provides and effective teaching about what students must do to live healthy lives.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Huxlow Science College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 201 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 801 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	32	120	60	14	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	74	37	117	58	9	4	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	78	39	109	54	10	5	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	67	33	115	57	15	7	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	53	26	132	66	10	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	18	131	65	21	10	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	18	126	63	27	13	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	54	27	125	62	8	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	62	31	120	60	11	5	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	54	27	114	57	20	10	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	17	120	60	21	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	68	34	115	57	11	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	85	42	102	51	8	4	4	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



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18 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Huxlow Science College, Wellingborough, NN9 5TY

I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your college recently. Special thanks go to those of you who met with us, for their informative comments that helped us in making our judgements.

Our main conclusion was that the college is providing you with a good standard of education. It is a very special place where your teachers know you really well and enable you to develop a really good set of values. We were very impressed with your behaviour and your expectations that all students should never act in a way that interferes with learning. We liked the attitudes you expressed about people from different backgrounds and how keen you are to meet those who are different from yourselves in this country and beyond. The college does well in ensuring that all groups of students consistently achieve well, and makes especially good arrangements to ensure the students with the greatest needs are fully catered for. This is largely why we concluded that care, guidance and support are outstanding. Teaching is good and assessment is used really well so that you all know what you must do to improve. In the best lessons teachers really inspire you to learn.

To improve further we have asked the college to concentrate on making teaching and leadership and management even better. We want the college to ensure more teaching is really inspiring. We also think you would learn even more and be better prepared for the future if you had more opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning. You can help by checking that you are really challenging yourself when undertaking such work. We have also asked the college to aim to engage more effectively with your parents and carers. You can help by encouraging your parents and carers to take advantage of any opportunities they have to be more actively involved in your learning.

I wish you all the best for the future, and good luck particularly for those in Year 11 who will be undertaking examinations in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector

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